

Live and In Person at the Tivoli Theatre!



Monday, September 27, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Jake Cole | Slant | Rated R | 107 Mins.

Pablo Larraín's *Ema* opens on the purple haze of pre-dawn, the idyllic morning stillness broken by a streetlight that's been set aflame. Nearby, a woman stands stoically while holding a flamethrower, staring at a bleary stretch of cityscape in Santiago as the sun begins to rise. As far as introductions go, Ema (Mariana Di Girolamo) makes an immediate impression: With bleached slicked-back hair like Draco Malfoy, she projects a punkish antisocialness, to the point that it seems like she could have spray-painted the ultraviolet and neon-green hues of the film's color palette onto the frame. A dancer by trade, she regularly rehearses in lofts with a troupe of friends or twirls around town to the confusion and discomfort of others. She suggests a rupture, a glitch in the system of propriety, moving in blunt, aggressive ways that clash with the often-sedate settings in which she finds herself.



Ema's personality matches her image. Her conversational style is acidic, particularly with her estranged choreographer husband, Gastón (Gael García Bernal), with whom she's always cooking up a feast of invective. Both relentlessly taunt the other, Ema over his infertility, Gastón over her splintering mental health. Both take other sexual partners and flaunt their infidelities to each other, and much of the film pits Ema's brutal, loud confrontations against Gastón's cold passive-aggressiveness, and the only thing more unsettling about their caustic romance is how much the tethers that still connect them depend on this mutual cruelty.

The source of their tension is soon made clear: Wanting children, they adopted a boy, Polo (Cristián Suárez), whose behavior—setting fire to their home, stuffing a cat in a freezer—forced them to give him up. This rejection reverberates through Larraín's film, like the aftershocks of a colossal earthquake, not merely unbalancing

the couple but turning others against them. The teachers at the school where Ema works during the day—and where Polo attended classes—openly express their revulsion in a staff meeting about what to tell Polo's classmates. Elsewhere, Ema's friends in her dance troupe air their hostile feelings toward Gastón for how much of the responsibility for Polo's abandonment he assigns to her.

Bernal, restrained in both his words and how he holds his body, imbues Gastón with an imperiousness that points to the man's attempts to mask his guilt behind a stone face. Di Girolamo, meanwhile, is all movement. Even in close-up, the actress captures the perpetual jitteriness of her character's being. For Ema, dancing becomes an outlet for her contradictory feelings of defiance and grief. The film's music, both diegetic and extratextual, is by experimental electronic composer Nicolas Jaar, whose soundtrack combines ambient longueurs with brittle, frantic footwork—a sound that juts in and out of rhythm and force on skeletal beats and warm tone pulses. The music perfectly fits Ema's own underground style of dance, a manifestation of a human uncontrollably eating herself from the inside out.

In that sense, *Ema* marks a fascinating inversion of Larraín's prior film, *Jackie*, which concerned the pressures of having to filter one's all-too-real grief through performative displays of propriety. Natalie Portman's Jackie Kennedy, shell-shocked and robbed of her husband, lets the demands of office, even one as ceremonial and condescending as that of the first lady, dictate her behavior even in private. But *Ema*'s focus is on how mourning is expunged through chaos of words and flailing limbs, a movement that embodies a boundless sense of sexual wanderlust. As much as Ema and Gastón bicker, one is left to wonder just how much worse things would be for them if they didn't act out against each other. Perhaps their guilt would fester and their mutual recrimination would boil over and erupt like a grease fire.

It would be all too easy for Ema to pass judgment on its protagonists, whether over their reflexive rejection of parenthood in the face of its hardships, their combative relationship, or their sexual promiscuity, but Larraín is too interested in the ambiguity of the characters' physical expressions of their inner selves to condemn anyone. Indeed, a final act in which both Ema and Gastón lose themselves in sexual escapades is remarkable for how it ducks the usual depictions of hedonism as a sign of madness and loss of self, instead presenting their experimentation as affirmational and a cathartic reassertion of identity. In *Ema*, the literal union of bodies is the only logical means of sustaining emotional ties.

TIVOLI THEATRE

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\$7 After Hours Members | \$11 Non-Members

ANNETTE

Monday, October 4, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by John Bleasdale | Cinevue | Rated R | 141 Mins.

"It's counterintuitive, baby," Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard sing to each other early on in Leos Carax's Cannes-opener Annette – and indeed it is. As with every good musical, there's a grasp of the magnificent ridiculousness of the whole conceit. A full joyful embrace of the freedom and the rigors of the form, "We're scoffing at logic," they sing in a frank admission that the plot's credibility might not be the highest priority.



Driver plays Henry, a shock jock comic who likes to lay stress on the idea of killing the audience. Cotillard is Ann, an opera singer who dies every night to the thunderous applause of her fans and the quiet adoration of her conductor (Simon Helberg). Ann and Henry's love affair is idyllic in the same way that Eden hints at imminent expulsion and indeed dangers lurk in dreams, wolves howling in the forest and forests burning on the news. The delight is in the audacity and surprise of the film and so let's go light on the synopsis and suffice it to add that a child is born to the couple (the 'Annette' of the title).

Carax has always had a superb feel for the use of music – see Denis Lavant dancing down a Paris street to the sound of David Bowie in Mauvais Sang – but here he excels himself. It doesn't hurt that the music is provided by the brothers Ron and Russell Mael, also known as Sparks, who with this and Edgar Wright's documentary are having a hell of a 2021. The tunes are incredibly strong and have a catchiness that gives an immediate dejavu recognisability. Starting in a studio, the first number Now May We Start has the musicians and cast walking out of the studio and into

the street. There's an exhilarating cheekiness and wit to the songs – "The authors are very vain" – which earns the deeper moments to come.

Driver gives an astonishing performance as a man whose entitlement and rage make him unfit for the love he feels. It is a rich and deeply unflattering portrait which matches Marriage Story in its intensity and confirms Driver – if any more confirmation was needed – as the most versatile and powerful American actor working today. Cotillard has a less arduous task and indeed her character could be considered somewhat bland if it wasn't for Cotillard's charisma and a clear soprano voice. A late scene stealer, the young Devyn McDowell, almost walks away with the movie as Annette.

The go-to comparisons are probably going to be Damien Chazelle's La La Land and Lars von Trier's Dancer in the Dark (though James Bobin's The Muppets also springs to mind). It has the excitement of one and a dollop of the obsidian darkness of the other. And yet it is also very much its own wild thing. Carax and his collaborators are clever romantics. His intelligence pushes the film towards self-deprecation and irony – the film opens with a public service announcement not to breathe during the film – but there's the aching need for love and something more.



There's emotion here beyond the solipsistic self-pity of someone like Charlie Kaufman. Can you be romantic without being soppy? Can you be ironic without being cynical? Can you look up at the moon and into the abyss? Or do you have to choose? Caroline Champetier's cinematography matches these drives, draping the meta impulses in some old fashioned movie beauty which lends the picture a fittingly operatic grandeur. As with Carax's last film Holy Motors, Annette has and will divide audiences. It is the classic five or one star film and making a judgement feels also like an admission or a declaration. So be it.

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P I G

Monday, October 18, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Richard Roeper | Chicago Sun-Times | Rated R | 92 Mins.

When I first saw the poster for “Pig,” with a closeup of Nicolas Cage glaring right at us while sporting yet another long-haired/unruly beard combo platter, and I read the tagline, “We don’t get a lot of things to really care about,” and I heard this was the story of a reclusive truffle farmer who must return to the big city in search of his kidnapped pig, I thought:

Uh-oh. Is this “John Wick,” but with a pig instead of a puppy?

It certainly sounded like the latest in a long line of quickly forgotten, over-the-top, paycheck-cashing, Nicolas Cage vehicles, in the mostly dubious tradition of “Prisoners of the Ghostland” and “Jiu Jitsu” and “Willy’s Wonderland” and “Primal” and “Kill Chain” and “Running with the Devil” and “Color Out of Space” and “A Score to Settle,” and that’s just the last three years of Cage cranking out so many bat-bleep crazy movies it’s become a thing and a meme and a GIF, to the point where even Cage is on the joke, at least to a point.



Well, here’s the beautiful news. Director/co-writer Michael Sarnoski’s “Pig” is a brutal, elegant, mournful, captivating and magnificently filmed story that somehow manages to mix in elements of wilderness films such as “Jeremiah Johnson” and “Into the Wild,” kitchen-centric cooking movies like “Burnt” and there’s even a scene straight out of “Fight Club” — not to mention more than one reference to Greek tragedies. Through it all, Nicolas Cage delivers a performance of simmering greatness, grabbing every inch of the screen without hamming it up, dominating scenes in which he has very little dialogue, and moving us deeply when he is asked why it means so much to him to get his pig back, when after all, there are other pigs out there.

“I love her,” comes the reply. And we believe him, and we want nothing more than for this man to be reunited with the one creature on this Earth he still cares about.

Sarnoski divides the story into chapters with absurdist titles such as “Rustic Mushroom Tart” and “Mom’s French Toast and Deconstructed Scallops” and continually navigates the line between the existential and the gritty/authentic, starting with the opening, dialogue-sparse sequences set deep in the Oregon wilderness

where Cage’s Rob lives in a remote cabin with his beloved truffle pig, who is a master at sniffing out the rare fungi coveted by so many restaurateurs. Once a week, an ambitious young salesman named Amir (Alex Wolff) comes roaring up in his obnoxious yellow muscle car and traipses through the mud and muck in his dress shoes to buy the truffles from Rob, who barely acknowledges Amir’s presence and has no interest in idle conversation.



This is the routine, and it’s the routine Rob would like to follow for the rest of his days — but his world is shattered when two meth addicts break into his cabin in the middle of the night and take his pig, and the sounds of that terrified squealing animal will pierce your heart. Rob learns his pig is most likely in the hands of someone in Portland, so for the first in 15 years, he’ll return to the city where he was once a legendary chef and is now something of a mythical figure. He wants his pig back. He’ll do anything to get his pig back.

Once we’re in Portland, “Pig” is a deep dive through the looking glass, as Rob endures a horrific beating before he has even cleaned up the wounds sustained at the hands of the kidnapers and spends the rest of the journey careening through town covered in blood and dirt, oblivious to the stares of the townsfolk. Alex Wolff and Cage have a terrific buddy-movie chemistry, as we learn the outwardly slick and smug Amir is at heart a decent fellow estranged from his monstrous father (Adam Arkin), who is the Pacific Northwest’s unquestioned king of rare foods and is in fact competition for Amir and might well have had something to do with pig’s disappearance. In one of the many spectacularly staged set-piece scenes in the film, the search for the pig brings Rob and Amir to an achingly trendy restaurant called Eurydice (a character in Greek mythology and that choice of name is no accident), where Rob meets with the celebrated Chef Finway (David Knell) and recalls in perfect detail how Finway briefly worked for him 15 years ago — and then proceeds to reduce the arrogant celebrity chef to a puddle by pinpointing him as a total sellout.

“Pig” is not a revenge film, nor is it the most compelling mystery in the world, though we care greatly about the fate of that poor creature, and we do eventually find out what happened to her. It’s a rustic, poetic, occasionally funny, sometimes heartbreaking and wonderfully strange and memorable character study of a man who is in such tremendous pain he had to retreat from the world. Cage is magnificent as Rob, reminding us that when he’s at his best and he has the right vehicle, he’s one of the best actors in the world. This is one of the best movies of the year.

Please join us for our thought provoking post screening discussions!



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A detailed black and white illustration titled 'Summer' by Julie Sutter-Blair. It depicts a sun with a human-like face, surrounded by various fruits like apples and oranges, and large flowers. A small square box with the Japanese character '夏' (summer) is at the bottom right of the artwork.

"Summer" by Julie Sutter-Blair



"Dynamic and electrifying."

IndieWire

Monday, September 27 at 7:30 pm

"A cinematic high-wire act that is both brilliant and frustrating to behold."

Jordan Ruimy, World of Reel

Monday, October 4 at 7:30 pm



"Nicolas Cage is not just an actor. . .
he is a state of mind."

Michael Nordine, Variety

Monday, October 18 at 7:30 pm